

# ODFW Commission wrestles with questions about wolf management

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

SALEM — A couple of items emerged June 8 when the citizen commission that sets Oregon's wildlife policy sat down once again to gnaw on the state's plan for managing wolves.

Among them: There's a question about who should investigate when Oregon wolves devour livestock. A "depredation," as it's called in wildlife management-speak. The Oregon Department of Fish Wildlife says it could use some help. Cattle ranchers would like to see properly certified local groups involved, to speed up the process. Depredation investigations are important because wolves involved in enough of them can end up dead. "Lethal control" is the polite term.

Oregon State Police say no thanks. The OSP Wildlife Division head, Capt. Jeff Samuels, said his game officers would need eight hours of training each, about 1,000 hours total. That's expensive.

"I don't think it fits into our mission," Samuels told the commission members. "Depredations are not a law enforcement issue."

He said OSP is happy to help ODFW biologists, but making the call on whether wolves were responsible for killing livestock is not its responsibility.

While Samuels was handy, ODFW Commissioner Bruce Buckmaster said the commission has heard allegations that wolf poaching has increased.

"There certainly is poaching of wolves," Samuels responded. He didn't provide more details and the commission didn't ask for any. Groups such as Oregon Wild, Cascadia Wildlands and Center for Biological Diversity maintain wolf poaching is on the rise.

Another issue: Does the burden of Oregon's wolf management approach weigh too heavily on private landowners? People in northeast Oregon, especially in Wallowa County and especially cattle ranchers, would say of course. Russ Morgan, ODFW wolf program manager, said



Courtesy Baker Aircraft/ODFW

After radio-collaring a sub-adult female of the Chesnimnus pack Feb. 23 in Wallowa County, an ODFW biologist double-checks the fit of the GPS radio collar. As it works to update its management plan, the Oregon Fish and Wildlife Commission is wrestling with a host of wolf issues.

74 percent of confirmed wolf depredations occur on private land.

Michael Finley, the ODFW Commission chairman, raised the question. He said it's a dichotomy: Private land with private expectations, and a public resource — wolves — is doing damage and costing owners money.

He wondered out loud whether wolves on private or property ought to be managed differently. For example, require only two confirmed depredations on private land instead of three, the uniform private-public standard.

It's complicated because most Oregon land is about 50-50 federal and private, often butting up against each other. Wolves go where they want and ranchers use both, because grazing is permitted on land managed by the BLM and Forest Service.

Todd Nash, a Wallowa County commissioner who is wolf committee chairman for the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, agreed property lines are intermixed and sometimes unfenced. But he said cattle are private property, and ranchers wouldn't allow someone to rustle their

cattle, for instance, no matter where they were grazing. Insert eat for rustle and the point is made.

The ODFW Commission wasn't taking public testimony during the meeting, but Nash, like Capt. Samuels of OSP, was present and the commission asked him a question.

The discussion came as the commission gathers its thoughts on a draft five-year wolf management plan. The commission has held three public hearings and will adopt a plan later this year.

The overriding issue may be local control. Some people who follow the process believe the rules should be loosened in northeast Oregon, where most wolves live.

Jim Akenson, conservation director for the Oregon Hunters Association, said hunting and ag groups favor "active management" in the northeast corner of the state. Akenson, whose wife, Holly, is an ODFW commissioner, lives in Wallowa County. He said wolves should be managed more like cougars and bears, with "less caution" on lethal removal, more consideration for the impact of wolves on

# Water rights transaction fee hike gains traction

An increase of 16 percent on many transactions has cleared a key subcommittee

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

SALEM — A key group of lawmakers has approved a 16 percent fee hike for Oregon water rights transactions while a more controversial proposal has languished.

Fees for numerous water rights transactions administered by the Oregon Water Resources Department would collectively be raised by 15.88 percent under House Bill 2295, which averts the loss of 5.5 full-time staff dedicated to processing such requests.

"People would have to be laid off and transactions would go through slower," said Rachel Snell, executive director of the Oregon Water Resources Congress, which represents irrigation districts.

"You've got to have people at the department who can process those pieces of paper," Snell said.

The bill was scheduled for a June 16 vote by the Joint Committee on Ways and Means after recently clearing its Natural Resources Subcommittee with a "do pass" recommendation, which bolsters its chances of approval by the full Legislature.

If HB 2295 does become effective, it would mark the third increase in water rights transactions fees since 2009, but if it fails, those fees would revert to 2009 levels.



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press  
A linear irrigation system operates in a corn field in Oregon's Willamette Valley.

The OWRD argues the latest hike is necessary because of rising salary, benefit and retirement expenses, and points out that it's significantly reduced backlogs of various transaction types in recent years.

The Oregon Farm Bureau does not oppose HB 2295 as long as there are no other new fee increases that would skew funding for water rights transactions more heavily toward irrigators, said Mary Anne Nash, public policy counsel for the organization.

Currently, the total cost of such transactions — which covers roughly 35 staff positions — is split evenly between the general fund and irrigator fees.

A proposal to impose a new \$100 fee on all existing water rights in Oregon, House Bill 2706, is also before the Joint Ways and Means Committee but it hasn't been referred to a subcommittee, which is generally a necessary first step toward passage.

While HB 2706 will technically stay alive through the end of the 2017 legislative session, it's expected to go no farther this year, said Snell of OWRC.

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